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OBSERVATIONS ON OUR JOURNEY TO AFRICA

by

Lloyd C. Wicke

We visited our work in Africa. Like many we found the experience fascinating, rewarding and never-to-be forgotten.

Among the items we shall not soon forget are the fathomless reaches of the equatorial forest over which we flew; the celebrated veld of the Union; the endless rolling hills of the Congo, seldom harboring a trace of productive life but prosperous with possibilities; symmetrical pyramids of crushed waste in the Union and the Rhodesias mute testimony of man's never-ending craving for gold; the restless blue of the Indian Ocean; idyllic hills and valleys which embrace Mutumbara and Old Umtali; the majestic, magnificent, and mysterious Congo River and its multifingered tributaries drenched in history and pregnant with unspeakable, unharnessed power waiting only for imaginative man and that fabulous and elusive item known as capital.

We shall remember the almost endless canyon-like roads in the Congo and Liberia which apparently meander forever but then suddenly burst forth upon a nodule of life — a bit of civilization transplanted as though from another world. And for a day or two, or three this island — a mission station — becomes your home.

We shall never forget the welcome we received as weary, dust-laden travellers shook hands with those who a moment before were strangers but by the bond of Christian fellowship became friends within the instant, by those who had shared your weariness and had tasted the neverending, inescapable red and gray dust (Dust — Africa's one great democrat!) — and what was more, live with it day after day, year after year, without complaint.

We remember journeys over the stations as men and women shared the tools with which they labored, so often niggardly poor and shoddily miserable in the extreme, but tools they were. As tools they used them not because they did not know good tools, but because they were the best the church had provided. They shared their passing victories and hopes of what was yet to be, if we could but pull a stouter oar. The canker laden defeats and narrowed spheres of action which some shared apologetically harbored no excuse or accusation,

but we felt the sharp sense of unexpressed indictment because someone in the States had fumbled, or forsaken, or forgotten.

We remember the bougainvillaea in reckless multi-colored abundance making gay the most gnarled and dismal landscape. The jacaranda, the poinsetta, the flamboyant, and common annuals so prevalent in our homeland, all march before our mind's screen as we live again days that were touched with strange divinity.

Long shall I remember the day we watched those intricate operations performed in a surgery that no self-respecting technician back home would enter. We saw miracles occur that the renown Schweitzer had not essayed. But, who among our number knows the name of Bitsch-Larson, or Davon Corbitt or George Harley, or Hyla Waters! The latter two, possibly; the former, I doubt. Yet, both skilled young surgeons could command a king's ransom in Europe or the States but are serving another King magnificently, not on Broad and Main or Park and Fifth, but on the periphery of a wild no-man's land.

We remember the night we suggested asking the members of the Central Congo Conference what they would wish to say if given two minutes to address a District Conference in the States. Those with whom we consulted beforehand assured us the experiment would be but a dismal recital of requests for money and goods, for this and that. It proved to be nothing of the kind. It became a unique and heartening testimony of what our missionaries over a generation had done for them. They recited a catalogue of sparkling excellence, asking only for more personnel to aid in the war against darkness, ignorance, disease and poverty.

How clearly we remember the children and over and again the lines from that haunting melody in "The King and I" come to mind: "The children, the children - I can't forget the children." Children of all ages, multi-cultured, multi-lingual, but growing in a faith and dedication that would return a far larger percentage of them to the mission field than any other segment of our membership.

We remembered those last hours when a thousand things were to be said and you wanted to promise so much that was utterly essential: that surgeon - those instruments for his hard-won specialty, which no one had provided to date; that nurse - the simple equipment for her hospital, her babyfold, her leprosarium, inasmuch as she had practically none; that evangelist - the added native help he so sorely required but could not afford; that station community - a dependable

source of water and light (have you ever been without these?); that agriculturalist—with a bit of money, really very little, to buy those blooded sheep that might make the diet difference so essential to health. On and on we remember and wonder whether the folk back home will listen to our story prayerfully and sensitively, or just listen politely and pass by to items closer home, and far more practical.

All these things we remember out of our journey from Monrovia to Ganta, from Leopoldville to Elisabethville, into the Rhodesias, and the Union, out through Mozambique, the Sudan and Europe.

Whatever impression our African journey provided we cannot escape the sense of sharp CONTRAST dogging our every step. The sheer size of the continent, its variety, and untapped abundance.

Let me cite but one, the Congo, a Belgian colony. Its land area is almost as large as India, or the entire area of the United States west of the Mississippi, and 85 times larger than Belgium itself. India has a population of 350 millions, the United States about half that number, and Belgium about 1/10 that of the United States. The entire Congo population numbers just less than that of Belgium.

The terrain of the Congo is as varied as our middle west and is drained by one of the world's largest rivers, 14,000 miles in length, when one adds her navigable tributaries, and YET, lack of water is one of her perpetual and harassing problems. Withal it is estimated that the Congo is capable of producing 1/5 of all the hydro-electric power on the globe, but presently produces less than any country we have visited to date.

Her climate varies from the well-publicized steaming equatorial belt to ever-cool nights and chilling winters. In fact, no single night were we without substantial covers during our entire journey, and usually we called them blessed!

The Congo, as so much of Africa, possesses endless grazing areas which would put our plains and the southern pampas to shame, but hardly a head of stock is encountered inasmuch as the rolling land is crying for someone to banish the tsetse fly and provide an abundance of meat in return. We saw almost every variety of choice, colorful mahogany used in a thousand ways because it is cheaper than yellow pine in America.

Africa is the reputed land of giant animals — the last great haven for those of traditional ferocity who still roam large sections of the earth. But, it is not these who are the most damaging agents of de-

struction. It is the tiny ants; white ants, brown ants, red ants, warrior ants. These provide one of the more dramatic contrasts of a land laden with them.

More gold, precious stones and costly metals are mined in the continent than any other I know, yet human slavery in its several forms provides the fundamental pyramid of labor on which these industries rest and thrive.

The only beast of burden the continent has known is man, using it in the generic sense, for in this instance man is "the woman." Much of Africa knew not even the wheel. A generation that has over-leaped all the intermediate steps uses the automobile as though born to the mechanical life.

Yesterday, and in many places today, a man comes out of the jungle as naked as his fathers. Within a few years he shall be a mechanic, a technician, an instructor. Two generations separate some from cannibalism and cosmopolitan university training.

Mrs. Elspeth Huxley wrote in the preface of her new edition of the *Life of Lord Delamere*,

"Today's Masai undergraduate at Cambridge might be the son of one of Delamere's aloof and pig-tailed cattle-herds; grandsons of the Kikuyu who bartered with him grain for beads under the watchful eye of an armed askari are today's journalists and politicians who claim all Kenya as their own and call for the expulsion of Europeans and full rights of self-government."*

Almost endless numbers of tribes dot the landscape. Anthropologists have reduced their basic number if not their dialects. Though these tribes had no written language until the missionaries reduced their tongues to writing, they did possess a singularly complicated grammar and diction. The word for "thank you" and for "adultery" is spelled identically distinguishable only by a slight nuance in pronunciation, seldom caught by the untrained ear. The word for "God" and for "pig" is identical, likewise, and one is saved from inevitable confusion, or worse, only by graceful and musical language inflection.

*Quoted Thomas Hodgkin, *"Nationalism in Colonial Africa,"*
NYU Press, p. 15

Aboriginal and simple are these folk, but listen to some of their axioms and proverbs which would do credit to Poor Richard's Almanac:

"The white man has no kin, his kin is money."

"Once a baboon has tasted honey it does not touch the earth again, meaning that once a white man has been put in a position of authority he does not accept again an inferior position."

"There is no peace in any country, the forest is the only quiet."

"If you do not travel you will marry your sister."

"It is not difficult to hurt, but it is very difficult to repair."

"A pole is strengthened by another pole."

"Authority has no skin."

"Heaven never dies, only men do."

In a thousand ways these "aboriginals" possess a keener insight into the motives of men than do their white compatriots.

Justice is still the child of trial by sasswood in more places than we might guess even though the white man has celebrated his brand of justice far and wide.

Africa is one of the few places in the world where no man need starve and where a balanced diet is readily had from nature's immediate bounty and yet the ravages of imbalanced diet are in evidence everywhere and starvation is always next of kin.

Africa is a place where the Roman Catholic Church would rather maintain her almost impregnable position and sentence the masses to misery, than permit a Protestant missionary to bring healing and delivery to the suffering people. This is more readily understood when we remember that one of the cardinals recently commented that Africa was threatened by three great religious vices, the first is Mohammed-

anism, the second is Communism, but the greatest of these is Protestantism. All of this to the professed helpless bewilderment of members of our foreign diplomatic corps who are mightily troubled about bases in the Azores, but apparently not about religious tolerance.

Africa is a place where you may listen to the strains of Brahms Chopin and Liszt from a concert pianist, a part of our missionary personnel, and enjoy as background music the beat of aboriginal drums.

Africa is a second century world being awakened from her slumber by the incessant rapping of 20th century culture. Everywhere these contrasts are in rampant evidence pleading for some cosmic or human midwife to deliver the land from its travail.

In one sharp etching this contrast can be observed. Visit the Ambassador Hotel in Ghana and you cannot be unaware of blatant rainbow tinted togas worn by giant men who appear like some reincarnation of a Roman senator in his most glorious hour. Then wander down a road toward Kapanga in the neighboring Congo and the contrast blares forth with unforgettable violence. And, this is today's Africa teetering on the edge of tomorrow.

It is a land of CONTRAST and also one of CONFLICT.

The conflict is not only between second and 20th century culture with all of the respective over-tones and under-tones; not only the conflict between multi-tribal customs as over against western mores. It is a conflict between a culture that had elemental cohesive qualities and one that has in it the elements of division and diversity. The conflict is between notions of tribal ownership, or communal ownership and regency, as over against the western notion of the private ownership of property and central judicial control.

Conflict between a society grounded in animistic religious notions and one acting on semi-Christian, semi-materialistic, semi-atheistic grounds.

Conflict between the grinding toilers of an earthbound agrarian society in which the women furnish the productive hands in village life and an intricate industrial society which sends armies of men into the mines and the isolated bachelor compounds a thousand miles from home working for a pittance a day, less than the price of two packages of cigarettes in American money.

Conflict between simple justice as Christian missionaries have preached it, and many have lived it, and the rough strident, appro-

priating behavior of the so-called Christian entrepreneur.

Conflict between the promise of possible and necessary change in the social and political spheres, which the Christian Gospel has always preached, and the expedient-haunted manner in which the white men have hedged the threatened possibilities of change, or absolutely refused to grant it.

Conflict between what our western universities have taught their African students and what is being denied them in the land of their birth by the sons of the west. They have been taught Christian ideals of brotherhood, and the Protestant dogma of the Elect of God. They have been taught that poverty, unemployment, ignorance and disease are enemies to be exorcised with the tools readily available. They have been taught that every man should be adequately, humanely rewarded for his labor as a man, and not as an incident in the chain of anonymous production. They have been taught that a people has a right and a duty to choose its own governors, to cast out "the rascals" who betray their better interest when it seems wise and prudent, and to celebrate those who serve it well. This they have been taught and then denied the lesson's application.

One need but mention these common places of simple democracy and remember recent European behavior in Africa to recognize the open lines of inevitable and dire conflict.

The areas of conflict are far wider than requisite time to detail them, but they do include the Christian doctrine of brotherhood as taught by our missionaries and the unwillingness of the white man to apply the doctrine to inter-racial relationship. Our appeal to the primacy of reason and rational approach to matters of political policy is lost in our resort to irrational and unreasonable positions in matters of government and economics. Our avowed testimony as to the supreme worth of the individual is lost in the deafening roar of our flagrant resort to mass destruction in global war.

All these conflicting notions and behavior patterns suggest to the African that either our Christianity is not what we say it is, in power or effect, or we just are not Christians and have no right to appeal to the principles of a religion we cannot, or will not appropriate as our own. He wonders why we are not Christian if this Way is the ultimate revelation of God's will for man. Musing and wondering bring him little peace or consolation. Only conflict is his legacy, and its child is cynicism.

We may sum it up by seeing the conflict as one between an awakening Goliath, who is uncertain of his strength but surmises his power, trying to apply the ethics of a conquering benefactor to the common relations of his daily life. Discovering to his bewilderment and frustration that these ethics are not to be applied commonly and universally but are a show piece to be admired and not rigorously practiced, unless it meets the selfish desires of the conqueror.

It is the essence of this conflict to beckon a leader whose name probably will not be Nasser, Nkrumah, Mboya, or Kenyatta, but a leader will arise and the resolution of the conflict could be completely overwhelming for the white man.

CONTRAST and CONFLICT do not necessarily breed peace, as Hegel believed the behavior of thesis and antithesis would produce synthesis exhibiting a temporary quality of stability. Contrast, if sharp enough, conflict if sufficiently violent will produce CRISIS.

The present ingredients of crisis require only some triggering episode, In the Union of South Africa there are those who believe the present conservative government is seeking just such a triggering episode to smash any possible African combination for the next generation or more. Another incident such as the murder and cannibalistic mutilation of that nun would provide the crisis in which the white man may win a coveted victory but it could hardly be more than temporary, the world being what it is today.

Other elements on the African scene may be triggering the crisis, although these may call for gradual and not catastrophic revolution.

We happened to be in Liberia during the days of Nkrumah's visit to Monrovia. He was completing a return visit to the capitals represented at the All-Africa Conference which he had called earlier in the year.

Nkrumah repeated a position stated previously to the effect that he "stood for no racialism, no discrimination against any race or individual, and an unalterable opposition to imperialism in any form." He added, "let the nations (in Africa) choose peace or war, let it be peace with racial equality. But war if we have no other course."

There were those who decried the statement as the swaggering of an adolescent — "war if we have no other course." Others heard a portent of the coming judgment on the generations.

To visit Accra, to speak with persons well placed in our government and other embassies is to discover admiration, sometimes all

too grudging, that Ghana has done so well, almost fantastically so. Most men would have forgiven failure and brought a tear-stained alms, but success in Africa by Africans cannot readily be forgotten and will not be easily forgiven. Here is the black man doing naturally what the white man thought came naturally only to the white man. Here is the white man discovering the truth of Aristotle's observation that man (yellow man, white man, yea and verily even the black man) is an inveterate political animal.

Ghana, Nigeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Egypt in their ways (remember how we were told no Egyptian could ever pilot a ship through the Suez, not to mention a fleet of them) may well be the triggers that will resolve these crucial days, not explosively, but surely as ferment in the meal leavens the whole lump.

Literacy more and more is playing the role of this fermenting agent. To read what other black men are doing in the land of their birth is a heady tonic for men heavy laden with another's opulence which he helped create but is sentenced never to share. Literacy may well be dynamite in the social lump.

John Stuart Mill described Britain's colonies as "A vast system of outdoor relief for the upper classes." The so-called colonies, or national dependencies, are becoming less and less outlets for the unemployed upper classes, and more and more the slowly waking masses of humanity, seeking relief for themselves, will demand their independence.

In this struggle toward crisis, governments are increasingly building hedges, higher and higher they go, to keep the African outside the charmed circle of possessions, and within the confining limits of under-class laborer; South Africa and apartheid; the Federation and virile segregation; Portuguese possessions and tight-lipped, tight-fisted absolute control; Belgian bowing to opportunity but maintaining comparatively low ceilings of human visibility for all men of color; French irrational blundering; England still rear-guarding the era of the Victorians; all these are the ingredients of crisis, and none of these, with the possible exception of the British and the Belgians provides much hope of being a Christian solvent forestalling disaster. If the British prove possessed of such a solvent, even as they did in India and in Ghana, it will be their innate sense of Christian decency which will make the final difference and make of crisis a crossing to fuller days and wider Commonwealth possibilities.

CONTRAST, CONFLICT, CRISIS!

Let us conclude on the golden note of CONSECRATION.

We have travelled on the five continents and have never discovered a finer, if as fine, a degree of Christian consecration on the part of so many! Time and again as we travelled I thought of a word Albert Schweitzer had written half a generation ago. We visited those who knew of the doctrine, who would say,

“He speaks to us the same word, ‘Follow thou me!’ and sets us to the tasks which he has to fulfill for our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they pass through in His fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they learn in their own experience WHO He is.”

We sojourned with those who have learned through “toil, conflict, suffering” the ineffable mystery of His fellowship, and we pray that a portion of that experience has been the legacy of our journey.

We listened as Africans told the story of their odyssey from darkness to light, from the chains of fear to the liberation of faith. We listened as a workman, chosen by his fellows, told of the evangelistic work of Burlbaugh and Law, two of our construction men. Laborers are the “end of the line” socially and economically. They are the African outcast. Said they, “when we worked with these Christian engineers we discovered new meaning in our menial labors, a new joy, a new manhood, for through these men the Carpenter of Nazareth became the builder of a new way of life for us. He became our Saviour.”

We listened as a paramount chief recounted the story of his people's long travail. When they became ill with sleeping sickness the common judgment suggested that “God was angry with them.” A Christian doctor came among them and after eight years not a case could be found. The chief was asked as to present conditions and he replied, “Since this man came among us we have discovered that ‘God is good.’ ” These are men and women who are fighting ignorance, disease, hostile enemies unnumbered with the inexhaustible ammunition of science and of love, with the unnumbered graces of Christ.

Consecrated skills we met that would grace any school, any surgical amphitheatre, and any Christian pulpit. Earlier mention was made

of the fact that the Methodist Church has men in its mission service whose contribution has been as significant as that of Albert Schweitzer, medically, surgically and pedagogically, possibly more so.

For instance, there is George Way Harley who went to Ganta about forty years ago, that outpost 160 miles east of Monrovia and only a mile from French West Africa. Out of an untouched wilderness he built one of Africa's memorable stations, all the while adding superlative knowledge in several allied fields of investigation. When one of the largest pharmaceutical firms on the planet sought a cataloguing of aboriginal remedies, as it sought some miracle drug which might equal the tranquilizers, it dispatched a celebrated botanist. He beat a path to Harley's door and discovered that he had catalogued and described over 350 varieties out of a known and surmised 400 – plus. Some years ago Professor C. S. Coon of the University of Pennsylvania wrote of Harley,

“He has the specialized knowledge of the black man and the detached understanding of the exceptionally gifted white. He can think black or white at will....Harley's rare accomplishment is his ability to live in and describe a second world, without removing his feet from that in which he was born and educated. In other words, he has perhaps gone further into the native consciousness than any other man who has not himself passed irretrievably over the line.”

One of the obvious reasons for this remarkable ability may be found in Dr. Harley's deep religious consecration and his willingness to share this sense with the African.

One of our contemporaries, not a Christian in the formal sense visited Africa and on his return journey wrote to a friend,

“I subscribe to no organized creed. My knowledge of missionaries has been more or less confined to the satirical cartoons in sophisticated periodicals. However, my picture....underwent a sudden change. What altruism led them to throw over the comforts of an urban life....for the hard work and often the impossible conditions of a tiny outpost was beyond my comprehension. I learned what a Christian institution really does....The Christian spirit; in the purest and best meaning of the word, was

creating a slow but significant miracle in that green and lovely place.”*

In a manner not quite describable, the Word is becoming flesh, the Christian spirit is creating the ferment of a new world that may well bequeath a tired old world new hope and new life.

Africa, land of CONTRAST, arena of CONFLICT, hovering on the lip of CRISIS, with Christian CONSECRATION as the one prime ingredient that may well make the definitive difference, not only in Africa, but the world around. To have had an opportunity such as has been ours places me indelibly in the debt of a host of friends and the Church I serve.



**Quoted "Doctors Courageous" by E. H. Hume, p. 82
Quote from John Latouche*

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